

## CONSERVATION

# Armies of young CCC workers had a profound effect on Utah

*10-year program was a godsend for many trying to survive the Depression.*

By Twila Van Leer

Deseret News staff writer

*The headline: "Forest Program Begins Thursday; First 25,000 Will Go to Army Camp for Conditioning," Deseret News, April 5, 1933*

With the signing of Executive Order 6106, President Franklin D. Roosevelt created the Civilian Conservation Corps, a program that would have a profound impact on Utah over the next 10 years.

The CCC was part of Roosevelt's New Deal "first 100 days effort" to pull the United States out of the ongoing Great Depression that followed the stock market crash of 1929. An estimated 16 million Americans were unemployed, including 5 million to 7 million young men in the 16-25 age group.

Utah was particularly hard-hit by the depression, with its annual per capita income of \$300 — only 80 percent of the national average. Almost 36 percent of the state's work force was idle.

The prospects of government-sponsored work brought thousands of potential Utah enrollees to sign up, all eager to do whatever was required to earn \$30 a month. Over the next 10 years, the CCC workers performed hundreds of jobs in Utah, working on roads, building construction, flood-control projects, forest replantation and dozens of other tasks.

In the first enrollment in Salt Lake City on May 4, 1933, 140 men were selected from the 4,000 who applied. The U.S. Forest Service certified another 85 positions, and all 225 men trooped to Fort Douglas for medical examinations, new clothing and assignments. They became Company 940, Utah's first.

Of the \$30 CCC enrollees earned monthly, \$25 went back to their families, who were on government relief. But \$5 went a long way in those days. C.V. "Skip" Anderson

later told a Deseret News reporter. His father, Victor, was a heavy-equipment operator for the U.S. Forest Service and worked in CCC camps near Moab and Monticello.

Utah started with 20 camps, located primarily in national forests, with one in Zion National Park. Another five soon were set up for erosion control projects. Besides the Utah enrollees, young men began to arrive from the East, mostly from Fort Monroe, Va. The first emphasis of the project was to get young men out of the country's big cities and to work.

The first Utah camp, in American Fork Canyon, was completed by June 7. It had officers' quarters, a mess hall and kitchen, showers, hospital, recreation hall and utility buildings. Four barracks were quarters for 200 men. Over the years, there were 116 camps in the state, although not all were in use at the same time.

During the 10-year CCC experience in Utah, more than 3.2 million trees were planted. The preliminary work on several large dams, including Deer Creek and Pineview, was completed, and 309 small reservoirs were built. Along the Wasatch Front, hillsides were terraced and diversion dams built to prevent flooding. Campgrounds were improved and ranger stations (some of them still in use) were built. As the result of CCC efforts, for the first time there was a road from Escalante to Boulder, so mules were no longer needed to make the trip.

The experimental terracing methods used above Bountiful became a standard for flood and erosion control in mountain terrain.

Some summers, the ready-made work force spent its time battling crickets in parts of Utah. In Uintah County, crews put up 10-inch galvanized iron barriers that herded the insects into pits, where they ate each other or were burned or buried. An estimated 250 bushels of the crop-destroying pests were killed. In Oak City, Millard County, CCC workers with protective face masks laced fields with arsenic to

get rid of the hoppers.

Over the life of the program, the federal government spent \$52 million in Utah.

On average, CCC workers remained 18 months in the corps. For many of the young men, it was a better life than they'd ever known, despite the hard work. Anderson described thick steaks coming to the tables in dishpans, and there were plenty of hearty "meat and potatoes" meals. And for some, the CCC-issue shoes were the first substantial footwear they'd ever worn. They hesitated to take them off at night.

Some of the men learned to read and write, skills they had failed to gain at home. In one 21-man contingent of Virginians who came to Utah, only one could write his name, recalled Linn C. Baker, who also served in the corps and later became a Utah legislator and two-time state treasurer.

Ellis Armstrong, Utah's first director of highways and later U.S. commissioner of public roads and a member of the commission for the Bureau of Reclamation, spent the summer of 1933 laying out camp sites and water systems. He was then a student at the Branch Agricultural College, predecessor to Utah State University.

Many of the CCC boys received on-the-job training that prepared them for jobs in the private sector. Baker, for instance, was a camp cook and later got a job in a bakery.

The national experience also had an unanticipated benefit in providing a disciplined, trained pool of potential soldiers for World War II. From some of the Utah camps, more than half the men went on to serve in the military.

Some of the young men who came to Utah to do CCC work stayed to contribute to the cultural diversity of the state. Raymond N. Jiacolleti, who had been a teacher in Wyoming, remained to become mayor of Heber City for 20 years.

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Civilian Conservation Corps workers earn \$30 a month as they tackle a construction project in 1936.



UTAH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Hundreds of workers received food, clothing and shelter while serving in the CCC camps in Utah, where they completed wide variety of jobs.

## CCC

*Continued from N10*

Joseph Bernini, born on New York City's east side, was excited at the prospects of visiting the "Wild West" to be a CCC worker, according to a later news story. He left the train at Jericho, 18 miles south of Eureka, and got a sudden taste of the real West, sans cowboys and Indians. An Army truck took him to the nearby camp, and he went to work cutting cedar posts for fence lines, seeding desert tracts and building storage dams for watering livestock.

Bernini married a local girl, Grace Green, then served in the U.S. Navy, making seven landings in the South Pacific. He returned to raise a family in Utah.

The work was tough, but as Sam Westenskow later recalled, "We were glad for any job, even for jobs paying \$30 per month and your keep. . . . You got a good feeling from your work."

A typical Utah group was Company 959. The men had their first quarters in a small tent city in Joe's Valley below Manti Mountain. They moved to Mount Pleasant for the winter and in 1936 went to Ferron to do conservation jobs.

In the winter, heated gravel or water over fires built in 24-inch cement culverts provided a welcome hand-warming now and again.

A group building a road in Wil-  
lard Basin to facilitate erosion control had an adventure when an early snowstorm struck. Beginning

on a Friday night, the storm continued until the men, mostly from Arkansas, were up to their waists in snow and their tents had to be cleaned periodically to keep them from collapsing.

Snow closed the only road out of the area. By Tuesday morning, after a meal of frozen onions, about 80 "apprehensive Southern boys" started to march out, according to an article in the Utah Historical Quarterly, summer 1971.

With two or three of the "more husky boys" breaking a trail through the snow, they made an exhausting eight-mile hike to the safety of waiting trucks that took them to a comfortable base camp in Hyrum. After a few days of thaw, they returned to the work site to scatter ground-cover seeds on top of 6 inches of remaining snow.

The exuberance of youth didn't disappear in the camps. Several high jinks were recalled by Willard Smith and Vao Bowers when their unit had a reunion in Ferron. The two men, who had attended Cyrus High School together, saw an opportunity when a group of "greenies" was lined up waiting for physical exams. Bowers climbed on a stretcher as if an exam had "done him in" while Smith encouraged the impression.

As in Smith and Bowers' case, many friendships outlasted the CCC. And for all Utahns, including those who were never aware of the corps, the work done on the land continues to be a benefit.

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## WHOPPER

# Whale of a salty tale swims through pages of old Provo paper

*Imported whale industry in the Great Salt Lake? The Deseret News made no mention of it.*

**By Twila Van Leer**

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*The headline: "Tall tales run deep in the lore of the Lake," Deseret News, June 12, 1994.*

A family of whales — mama and papa and a couple of hundred little ones — in the Great Salt Lake? Was it a rumor based on fact, or is the account of 60-foot Leviathans in the lake just a whale of a tale?

In the 1994 Deseret News story listing the various life, real and imagined — mostly imagined — that has inhabited the Great Salt Lake, brief mention is made of whales.

A search of both the Utah State Historical Society files and the LDS Church journal history leads to a single June 24, 1890, article in the Utah Enquirer, a now-defunct Provo newspaper, as the source of the whale tale.

"Intelligent newspaper readers have not forgotten the inauguration 15 years ago by Mr. James Wickham, a scientific English gentleman, of the whale industry

for the first clue to the newspaper's accuracy — or lack of such. World Book Encyclopedia says the largest whales may, in fact, grow to 100 feet, but the average life span of the various whale species is only 15 to 60 years.

Undaunted, the newspaper continued with a detailed account of how hunters spent two years trapping two young "southern or Australian" whales off the coast of that continent, since it was assumed this particular species would fare best in the Great Salt Lake.

Initially, the challenge of obtaining "whale eggs" from the deep seas was "at once apparent," the story said, neglecting the fact that whales are mammals and give birth to live young.

Over the two years, however, Mr. Wickham's search party was able to capture two "beasts, each about thirty-five feet long," the newspaper informed its readers. The whales were shipped to San Francisco in 1873 (two years earlier than the 15 mentioned in the first paragraph of the story) in tanks built expressly for them. After they arrived in the California port, the article fails to explain how the mammals were transported to Salt Lake City, beyond saying that "fifty tanks of sea water accomplished their overland ship-

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